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ABSTRACT

The paper describes an international student exchange program for 11-year-old children, and discusses the operation and goals of the program in Mexico. The main objective of the program is to create a base for world friendship and global understanding during the pre-adolescent years, which are believed to be formative for acquiring basic social relation skills. Participating countries include the United States, Mexico, India, Canada, Liberia, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, England, and France. Four students and an accompanying adult visit a host school for a three to four week period where they teach native songs and dances, arts and crafts, games, and sports. In return the host school shares its culture. Every year a host school receives children from a country which has not previously visited them. Criteria for selection require that the child be 11 years old at the time of departure, sufficiently independent, emotionally stable, advanced in studies, interested, adaptable, and able to transmit his experiences upon returning home. Results of a study of the program indicate that students become personally acquainted with another country, become aware of the basic likenesses of all humans, acquire an active desire for world peace, acquire communication skills even when a language difference is present, and are free from prejudice. (KC)

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INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL TO SCHOOOL EXPERIENCE

I. S. S. E.

INTRODUCTION.

The I.S.S.E., developed by Dr. Doris Twitchell Allen, Psychologist and Proffessor of several Universities in the U.S.A. among them those of Cincinnati, New York and Maine, started with this idea in 1971. Although a separate organization, it is an extension of the Children's International Summer Villages (C.I.S.V.) also founded by Dr. Allen, which held it's first Village in 1951 and has held 310Villages in 32 countries, with 67 nations participating. The I.S.S.E., as a companion organization, operates on a wider scale. The visitors have an impact on all children in the school when they share their culture and friendship throughout the grades, as well as an impact on the families and community in which they live during their visit. This program can be considered as a design for educating a world society, that is, a society with a pervading concern for the well-being of all peoples. Thus, the field of consideration is broad, in fact, the whole world. The focus is upon people, all people all ages, any person anywhere. The task may appear too vague or too large to tackle, but looking at the broad outline of the essential forces, possible steps toward the goal become delinated. Actually, these steps emerge so clearly that they appear

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almost simple and they demand action. Therefore, it is a program which offers education for world friendship and respect and concern for all peoples.

The second thesis is the education, at the depth and breadth necessary to insure progress toward a world society, must occur before adolescence. Changes in personality can take place after that age but the surer base for behavior which can promote global living is education before adolescence.

The third thesis is that global relations can be learned adequately, that is, to the point of determining behavior, only through "action". And that action must be in a group that is perceived as representing the whole world.

PHILOSOPHY AND MAIN GOALS.

This Organization is fundamentally non-political, non-religious and non-profiting. It is open to all socio-economic and cultural societies, to all races and beliefs.

All elementary school children should be given the opportunity for face to face contact with many nationalities. All elementary school children need to build close personal friendship around the world, and have the opportunity to develop feelings of responsability for contributing to the shaping of a global community. International School to School Experience is presented as one way to meet this social need.

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EXPECTATIONS OF THIS PROGRAM.

Basically, to meet the need for educating the attitudes and the will of people globally. This design for preparation of individuals and groups for a world society, is based upon proven principles of learning. First of all, the approach is through "action". A person, or a group, learn through doing. It is not enough to talk about peace or a global community. Peace must be lived to be effective; and lived on a twenty-four-hour resident basis. Second, the practice should be in a situation as close to reality as possible. Every place is potentially accessible. This means that the task is to give individuals personal experience with the whole world. Thus, the action must occur face-to-face with different nationalities.

The shared experiences among the nationalities must vary to permit the breadth and depth of the personality; for example: from sports to worship or meditation, from swapping coins of their respective cultures to setting the table for lunchwith a person of another country and another language. Each person needs to absorb, unhurriedly, actions and attitudes of other cultures. Research supports an interpretation of personality growth with the program of attitudes, motives and habits of thinking wich are favorable to a world community, and to extend the education for world society to any and all elementary school children. This child graduated from the pre-adolescent experience, will engage in a variety of teenage and adult international experiences.

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I.S.S.E. INTERNATIONAL OFFICE.

International School to School Experience International Office is now located in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, U.S.A., where the International Annual Conference is held together with a workshop.

The countries that form the International Executive Committee are: the United States of America, Mexico, India, Canada, Liberia, Guatemala, Iran, Japan, England and France.

I.S.S.E. IN MEXICO.

International School to School Experience was initiated in Mexico in 1972, as a Civil Association. It is integrated by an enthusiastic group of school Principals, teachers and parents who started to spread out this program with great success.

Up to now, we have ten active schools operating, and twenty more schools that form part of this Association in Mexico.

Mostly, the interchanges from our country have been to different cities in the United States because this program is well expanded in that country and prehaps as well, because of cost reasons.

Nevertheless, we also have had several interchanges experiences with far away countries such as India. The result of these experiences were very positive as we counted with a very efficient work from the schools involved as well as from the Embassies from both countries.

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We have already planned the participation of schools from Mexico, the United States and Canada, and also from Europe, Asia and Africa as well as other parts of the world. During 1978, we also experienced individual child interchanges (without accompanying adult), having sent delegates to Seattle, Washington, U.S.A. These children had previously traveled and therefore, had experience on that way.

WHY IS THIS PROGRAM FOR ELEVEN-YEAR-OLDS?

This program of education is not beamed toward adults. The laws of learning point to the pre-adolescence as the formative years for acquiring basic social relations and concepts. These, in fact, start at infancy and develop during the early months of the first year. But this is not the right age for setting up an international relation. To establish this model, educators have to consider at what age a child can leave his parents and playmates, and at what age he carries the stamp of his culture in an international environment.

Through thorough investigation, we came to the conclusion that eleven-years is the appropiate age. Biologically, eleven-year-olds are open and receptive to new experiences. They are not rigid; prejudices are not too firmly set. They are free to express themselves; they are not hemmed in by the self-consciousness of early adolescence. They are not beset by the conflicts which often characterize the twelve-to-sixteen years old. On the other hand, they do not have the dependent seeking-of-adult of

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the ten-years-old. Generally, they are independent enough to be away from home for several weeks. Eleven years stands as appropiate both for the participant and for the needs of this educational task.

But the eleven-year-old cannot travel alone. Hence, the design calls for the child to be accompanied by an adult.

PROGRAM.

International School to School Experience sets up partnerships between an elementary school in one country and an elementary school in another country. This gives the opportunity for total involvement. I.S.S.E. brings four eleven-year-olds and an accompanying adult from one country into a host school of another country for a three or four week period. These visiting children teach their native songs and dances, arts and crafts, games and sports and perhaps, simple science experiments to the children of the host school.

These eleven-year-olds, two boys and two girls, meet each group from kindergarden through sixth grade, according to the schedule agreable to both hosts and visitors. The hosts in turn demonstrate their activities. All participate in one another's program. They come to make friends, share their culture and learn from the host's culture.

The visiting adult also has a schedule. Some period each day might be devoted to summarizing the adult's observational notes. Sometime might be given to teaching in the host school. The teaching might be informal talks, demonstrations in the special field of the adult, or teaching his (her) native language.

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At times, the visiting children need their adults as interpreter, but perhaps not for the regular sharing period in classes. Sometimes, the visiting children are more free and creative when they are "on their own".

LANGUAGE.

Usually, the visiting children do not know the language of the host country. But all understand one another through the action character of the shared activities, and through sign language which is spontaneously used by children of eleven. And part of the interest is to learn words and phrases of one another's language.

LIVING ARRANGEMENTES.

Each visiting child lives in a home where there is a same-age, same-sex child who attends the host school. The visiting adult lives with a fifth host family.

FINANCES.

The visiting adult and children do not have any living expenses during their stay. Their own school community pays for their travel expenses. In some cases, the child's family might pay his (her) expenses. But selection should not be made on the basis of ability to pay. The visiting

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child's family may contribute according to its means.

REVERSAL OF HOST AND VISITOR.

The visiting school becomes the host school some months or weeks later. For example, if a school of Mexico visited a United School in March, that United States school might send four eleven-year-olds to their partner school in Mexico in May, according to a schedule worked out between both schools.

MAXIMUM INTERNATIONAL CONTACTS.

Every year a host school receives children from a country that has not visited them previously, as far as rate of expansion of the program permits. With such plan, by the time a kindergardener has completed fifth or sixth grade, he has had the opportunity for face-to-face contact and friendship with children from six or seven countries. In this way, the elementary school experience is multinational.

SELECTION.

A good principle is that selection of the children and the adult to accompany them be based on the criteria other than ability of the person or person's family to pay travel expenses. A child representing his school should be:

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1) Eleven-years old at the time of departure for the host country.
2) Sufficiently independent and emotionally stable to be away from home for four weeks.
3) Sufficiently advanced in his studies to be absent from his school for four weeks.
4) Interested in becoming friends with children of other countries.
5) Interested in sharing his native songs and dances, arts, sports, costumes and language, and in turn learning from the host children.
6) Interested in adapting to foods, schedules, and family and school living which may be very different from his own.
7) Able to transmit his experiences to his school and to his community upon his return home, by radio, television, talks in person, exhibits demonstrations and so on.

The adult accompanying the children should be:

1) A person who enjoys working with children and is well accepted by them.
2) Interested in contributing to the goals of I.S.S.E. for a world community.
3) Prepared to teach some speciality, if so arranged between the adult and the host's school Principal.
4) Prepared to keep observational or other notes on the process of the project.

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RESPONSABILITIES OF PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS.

Schools as Visitors:

Two major responsabilities of visiting schools are:

1) Selection of a team of eleven-year-olds, two boys and two girls, and one adult to represent their school in a host country.
2) Arrangements for payment of round-trip travel expenses of the school's five representatives. (Such payment sometimes comes from civic groups or from Government, or some special grant, or other source or combination of sources, including the child's family).

Schools as Hosts:

The two major responsabilities of hosting schools are:

1) Arrangements for each of the four visiting children to live in a family which has a same-age, same-sex child who attends the host school, and for the accompanying adult to live in a fifth family.
2) Arrangements for these host families to provide the visiting children and adult with meals, except any provided by the school, local transportation, and with incidental spending money such as entertainments.

PREPARATION.

We have to emphasize the importance of an adecquate preparation for the child delegates and the Accompanying adult; for instance, they should be aware of the main philosophy of this experience, like respect of

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differences, learning and appreciation of new ways of life and, most of all, making new friends. We have noticed that if we encourage these attitudes before the delegates leave their country, they will rapidly succeed in relating themselves with other people in the other country. With this same purpose, the visiting group has to prepare some folkloric dances, songs, games and arts and crafts. All these common activities for all children will open favourable situations for intercultural action.

INFORMATION.

Advanced information concerning the host family and also the visiting family, including photographs, programs, schedules, religion, etc., are also necessary. We also consider very important to know in advance the host school programs, schedules, installations, etc. All these has to be done during the proper time by mail.

There should be meetings with parents, school Principals, teachers, accompanying adults with the participant children, so as to work together and encourage the group's inter-relations.

OTHER REQUIREMENTS.

The filling out of the official I.S.S.E. forms is also necessary. These forms are: Background Data on Child and Adult, Child's Health and Physical Exams, Release From Liability, Authorizations, etc., plus Passports, Visas and the arrangements for transportation.

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REPORT OF RESULTS.

Records are kept in a way to report objectively regarding the results. The participating schools contribute to these records and aid in the interpretation and the resulting recommendations. Such record-keeping is conducted in such a way as not to hinder the progress of the project.

Research was part of the originally conceived program. Investigations were formulated in reference to the goals; these specific goals are as follows:

1) If the children will make close friendships around the world, that is, that countries will become known to them in terms of close friends rather than abstract places on a map, or as steriotypes built up from ignorance or limited experiences.
   We have observed here, for example, that for Juan who lives in Mexico, when he knew about the earthquake in Nicaragua, he got a terrible impression as his friend Guillermo lived in Managua. His eagerness for communication put his whole family into movement until he knew that his friend was all right.
2) If children become aware of basic likeness of all humans, and at the same time that they will come to know and to appreciate differences.
   We have noticed here that children from different races - black, white, yelow, etc. - will cry and will smile under the same stimulus, and at the same time, they have different external demonstrations according to their culture.

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3) If children will acquire an active desire for world peace and a desire to work for it.

During these living experiences we have found a goodand positive fraternal atmosphere that the children would transmit to their whole community.

4) If the child would acquire skills of communication with individuals and with groups, even when a different language is represented and when no common language exists.

As we have already said, sign language which is spontaneously used by children of eleven, permits to easily understand one another through the action character of the shared activities.

5) If the children will begin to acquire skills of administration and organization.

From the experience we have had, we could observe that the child who is away from home and is "by-himself", develops personal skills of administration and organization.

6) If the children will develop their personalities, that are essentially free from barrier of prejudice.

This is spontaneously reflected in the child's attitudes, interests, behaviour and affection that he transmits to his companions, his family and his community.

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CONCLUSION.

This Association has operated for only eight years, and it is planned to have a long-range-time results. Therefore, it is impossible to give any statistics or other kind of evaluation at this moment.

Up to now, it is obvious that we have had very good turn-outs in giving the chance to all participants in this program to acquire a wider social projection which they transmit in a very clear and decisive influence through their different activities and work action to their classmates, schools, families and communities.

The children have had very good reactions and very interesting comments on their visits.

We are very happy so far with the results obtained, believing that "the future of the world is in the hands of our children".

Thank you very much.

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